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DoD to Restrict Cell Phone Use on Military Bases

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 5, 2006 - Defense Department installations have begun implementing new cell phone restrictions for drivers on military bases.

The new regulation, published in the Federal Register in April 2005, states that anyone driving a motor vehicle on a DoD installation cannot use a cell phone unless the vehicle is safely parked or the driver is using a hands-free device.

Many installations already have implemented the new restrictions, and the rest will implement the rules on their own schedule, said John Seibert, assistant for safety, health and fire protection for DoD. There is no deadline for installations to implement the restrictions, Seibert said, but he expects most will do so this year.

"We have not issued an implementation schedule," he said. "But it's definitely getting everyone's attention."

The law enforcement policy offices for each military department are putting together policies and procedures for the implementation and enforcement of the restrictions, Seibert said. He explained that this regulation is a minimum requirement, and installation commanders still have the authority to put stricter rules in place. Each installation will determine the punishment for violation of the rules, he said.

As the installations implement the restrictions, they have a responsibility to notify the public by putting up signs or putting notices in base newspapers, Seibert said. Many installations are allowing a grace period in which motorists in violation of the rule will be warned and not ticketed.

This regulation was developed based on information from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which studied driving distractions as the cause of motor vehicle accidents, Seibert said. The study found that cell phone use is the fastest growing and most visible distraction that leads to accidents, he said.

The DoD regulation follows suit with many regulations that states and cities have already imposed. Currently only Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and the District of Columbia ban hand-held cell phones for drivers, but many cities have imposed their own rules, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association.

"We are in front of the majority, but we certainly are not the first ones to do this," Seibert said.

This cell phone regulation will increase traffic safety on installations, Seibert said, but more importantly, it will encourage safe driving habits.

"Our intent is that this will drive an increased attention to the importance of safe driving and that we'll see a change in driving behavior, both on military installations and off," he said.

